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A HOME-ROOM PLAN

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In the school, as in the industries, the developments of the last fifty years have served almost wholly to obliterate the element of personal contact between the leaders and their associates. Formerly a shop superintendent knew and could call most of his men by their first names. The spirit of good fellowship and the respect of each for the other has had a lasting influence upon the industries of this country. But with the passing of the small personally conducted business has come a change in manufacturing, and now the trust with its remote officers and its distant organization has little to maintain the old *esprit de corps*. The schools in their development, with the rest of the country, have been seeking efficiency in administration, and the big city high school, with its thousand or more students, in the very nature of its organization has lost the element of personal contact and has made impossible the friendship between principal, teacher, and pupil. The usual plan, in such a school, of using one room seating the pupils of each year, with the attendant annual changes, does not serve to promote acquaintanceship in the school, but has a tendency to destroy the opportunities for personal control and influence. A high school which annually enrols seven hundred new pupils gives little opportunity for acquaintance. This intimacy is one of the elements in the earlier secondary schools which we have lost. Its influence was potent in the development of character in the high-school students of twenty-five years ago.

Reading *The Varmint*, by Owen Johnson, I saw that the bond of union evident in the description of "the House" at Lawrenceville Academy was evidently stronger than any other of the preparatory-school ties. The plan here described is an adaptation of this scheme. At Lawrenceville the success of the plan was due largely to the small numbers involved, to the hold that the

master of "the House" was able to maintain over his protégés, and to the spirit of House loyalty. It is not a new device, but has been in use elsewhere for some time in several high schools.

In the East Technical High School in Cleveland no rooms for the seating of pupils by classes were provided, but there were about fifty rooms with a seating capacity of thirty each, to which pupils have been assigned on coming to the school for the first time. This assignment is maintained throughout the pupil's course, and has a neighborhood basis. After a time this serves to promote and utilize the "gang motive," of which Dr. G. Stanley Hall speaks so enthusiastically in his work on adolescence. Thus, on entering the Technical High School, boys coming from the Columbia Grammar School are always assigned to Room 105, and thenceforth are known as Mr. Meck's boys. In the same way, the girls from the Columbia School are assigned annually to Room 207, and are known as Miss King's girls. (The girls and boys are segregated in nearly all work, owing to the differentiation in their technical courses.) Two or three schools sending small numbers to the high school each year are combined. To preserve democracy, unlike neighborhoods are fused, and it is so arranged that about ten or twelve new pupils are added to each room each year. In the case of a single school sending large numbers yearly, sometimes a division is made. Thus the Bolton School has two rooms for boys and one for girls, to take care of the large numbers entering the high school from this district.

Pupils so assigned may never recite to their home-room teachers. This assignment is made solely for the purpose of supervision, and is an effort to bring at least one teacher in the building into closer relation with each and every individual pupil. This relationship, once established, is broken only when the pupil leaves the school. Ere long the spirit of good fellowship develops between the teacher and his home-room group. He becomes their father in the school; he becomes their defender, and as his responsibility increases, he takes more and more real interest in his boys. By the time he has had his group four years, there springs up a real affection between the home-room teacher and his pupils. The addition of a dozen new pupils each year gives the home-room teacher but a small

number with whom to become acquainted annually, and eventually produces a group of about twenty-five or thirty. This number is sufficiently small so that the home-room teacher gets very close to the hearts of his boys before they leave him.

In this way, school spirit grows, in place of class spirit, and serves to develop control in all school activities. Within the school the plan is not without its effect upon scholarship. It is our custom to conduct weekly morning exercises through the fourth year, the valedictorian presiding and the salutatorian acting as secretary. Interest runs very high among the home rooms at the time when the averages for these two offices are being worked out. Discipline becomes easier on account of this organization, attendance improves, and many other school problems solve themselves.

I remember the anxiety of one group, which had had neither absence nor tardiness during the term, on the morning when delayed street-car service was detaining a member of the group, and how they secured signed testimony from the Street Railway Division Superintendent that this boy's tardiness was due to a street-car accident, and therefore not to be counted as tardiness.

Home-room pride soon becomes a factor, and the little knots of students comprising the units seek to promote the home-room influence in the school; they seek for recognition in school organizations and representation upon school teams. They have home-room teams of their own, and play competitive games in a school league. When the school annual is published, and representation on the school organizations are all printed, the rooms point with pride to this or that successful writer, debater, athlete, musician.

Not only the boy is benefited by this, but it reacts upon the teacher, who takes pride in his room organizations. The pupils soon learn that, after all, their home-room teacher is a human being, with interests not very different from their own.

Only recently, one of the boys was absent from Room 19, and inquiry from the neighborhood boys developed the fact that the absentee had been injured in an automobile accident. A teacher having charge of two hundred first-year students would have little interest in an individual, but the teacher in Room 19 had only

twenty-five boys, three-fourths of whom he knew intimately. Forthwith he went to see this boy in his home, and found a pitiable condition. The boy's leg was broken, and he lay upon the bed with nothing to relieve the monotony of his sufferings but one book, the sole literary property of the home, the *Geological Survey of the State of Ohio for 1900*. And so the home-room teacher sought out his stock of magazines, solicited additional ones from other teachers, and carried these to the boy. When the pupil finally recovered and re-entered school, the friendship which resulted served more than once to bridge the boy's difficulties in the school. Perhaps it has even served to keep the boy's work up when he might otherwise have left in discouragement.

Again, two pupils were recently sent from a class by a subject teacher; they complained bitterly to the home-room teachers of unfair treatment. Both teachers, who had faith in them, hailed the offending subject teacher before the principal in defense of their boys: the matter was adjusted, and we did not have an attack of *parens iratus*.

Last spring, on Arbor Day, some of the home rooms planted sycamore trees in view of the windows of their rooms, and are taking pride in their trees. Some day the pupils from these rooms, grown to men and women, will come back to the school and view with pride the tree which belongs to their room, and which they planted.

The influence of the home room extends beyond our own walls back into the eighth grade of the grammar school. Boys will come to a high school more readily if they think they are not to be lost in the great unknown, and who could want a better pleader with a boy to come to high school than one of his peers? Furthermore, the home-room teacher comes to know the grammar-school principal from whose building his pupils come, and the eighth-grade teacher becomes acquainted with the home-room teacher to whom her graduates are going. This also is retroactive, and serves to stimulate the good feeling between the eighth grade and the high school. So the element of personal contact, usually lost in the organization of a big city high school, need not be lost after all, and the spirit of co-operation, of mutual admiration and respect, comes to live again in the home room.